

Student: Ilhana Vele

Date: June 9, 2017

Professor: Burl Self

GGG 301

Geopolitical Behavior of Russia

Russia and its geopolitical motivations can be explained using the Rimland theory. There are two competing theoretical approaches to explaining Russian aggression in Eastern Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. These two competing theories are Rimland by Nickolas Spykman and Heartland by Sir Halford McKinder. The Rimland theory speculates that whomever controls the surrounding areas of a country will control the Heartland. The Heartland theory speculates whomever controls the Heartland should control the Rimland or periphery areas. Russia, who controls the vast heartland believes that they will ultimately control their neighboring territories. The United States who controls or supports countries in the periphery around Russia believes in Rimland theory of global dominance. For the analysis of this paper I will base my analysis of current geopolitical conflicts involving Russia using the Rimland theory.

The EuroAsian landmass is a vast global entity that spans several thousand miles, contains over a billion of people, and the majority of nation states and religions. Russia is a country that spans both Europe and Asia dominating the Euroasian landscape. The country of Russia was formed in the early 18th century on the periphery of European society (Kaiser 2017). After expanding in all directions the Russian empire came to control vast populations, resources, and wealth. The vast amounts of land, resources, and man power allowed it to become a leading superpower for over three centuries. It has fought with many nations not for control of its heartland but for the harbors, trade routes, and resources along its periphery that have allowed it access to the world's economy.



Most of wars fought by Russia have been for control of its borders. The Crimean war of the 1800's was Russians push to gain access to a warm water port in the Black Sea against a coalition of European powers (Goldfrank 2014). Russia joined WWI and WWII to acquire more land and resources. The enemies of Russia tried to defeat the country by invading its heartland. Napoleon and Nazi Germany both invaded and ultimately defeated by the vast resources that Russia controlled. More specifically, operation Barbarossa was Nazi Germanies' attempt at conquering Russia. Russia was able to supply itself through its eastern ports allowing it to overcome the German war machine (Lack 2011). The climate in Russia played a huge part during operation Barbarossa helping to defeat the German war machine who was unaccustomed to harsh weather patterns (Koch).

The modern state of Russian aggression can be explained easily using the Rimland theory. The justification for Russian intervention for the majority of recent conflicts is to protect Russian minorities in the border areas. In 2014 Russia supported the independence of Russian minorities in Eastern Ukraine and Crimea (Werker). Sparked by a revolution of pro-Western European groups the Russian government funneled monetary and military support to Russian separatists in the region. This region however contains Russian 's only warm water military naval base (Delanoë 2014). Possibility of losing this base would create a vulnerability for Russia in losing Rimland over Eastern part of Europe, Central Asia and Baltic states. Syria located in the Middle East also contains Russia's only naval base in the Mediterranean. When a civil war broke out in the late 2010 it threatened Russian's access to the Rimland in the Middle East and Mediterranean. Russian involvement in the Syrian civil war has become a proxy war between NATO and Russia (Allison 2003).

Russia is a vast country located in a vast landmass whose only geopolitical detriment is its ability to access the rest of the global economy. The Rimland or periphery countries surrounding Russia when controlled by that nation give it access to the world's economy and resources. The Rimland theory explains why Russia is constantly struggling to create 'puppet' states in its neighboring countries. As I have layed out in this paper, the Rimland theory is superior than the Heartland theory in explaining Russian motivation for acting the way it does on the world stage.

Work Cited Page

Allison, Roy. "Russia and Syria: explaining alignment with a regime in crisis." *International Affairs* 89.4 (2003): 795-823.

Delanoe, Igor. "After the Crimean crisis: towards a greater Russian maritime power in the Black Sea." *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 14.3 (2014): 367-382.

Goldfrank, David M. *The origins of the Crimean War*. Routledge, 2014.

Hildreth-Werker, V., and J. C. Werker. "RUSSIA AND UKRAINE."

Kaiser, Robert J. *The Geography of Nationalism in Russia and the USSR*. Princeton University Press, 2017.

Koch, H. W. "Hitler's 'Programme' and the Genesis of Operation 'Barbarossa'." *The Historical Journal* 26.4 (1983): 891-920.

Lak, Martijn. "Operation Barbarossa and Germany's Defeat in the East." *German History* 29.2 (2011): 335-337.